

# **Common Core State Standards and DIOCESE OF GAYLORD CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. Why is the Diocese of Gaylord choosing not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?**

It does not make sense for us to abandon our current curriculum model with over a decade of work aligning to college readiness and assessing student growth and performance in order to embrace (which at this time is) an untested tool. With nearly 99% of our students going on to higher education our schools have been aligned to college readiness for many years. This has been especially true for the past ten years as a concerted effort has been underway in our diocese to increase our Catholic identity, align curriculum, and inform instructional decisions by monitoring student growth over time. **All of the things that the Common Core initiative is presently proposing to address in the public sector, our diocese has been diligently working on in a strategic manner for the past decade.**

In the Diocese of Gaylord, employers consistently compliment the work ethic of our students; and at the same time, colleges and universities recognize that students admitted to their institution will not just attend for a time, they will graduate. While the Common Core may afford potential for gain, there is most certainly potential for loss as well. It would be irresponsible for our diocese to embrace that which has not been tested or proven superior to what we currently use. Nonetheless, our work of evaluating and examining the Common Core is ongoing.

### **2. What curriculum model is presently being used by the Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Gaylord?**

After an exhaustive amount of research, the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) was chosen as the best resource to guide our curriculum work. McREL is a research organization that continually sifts through the performance data of various state, national and international curriculums in order to identify and pair down those standards and benchmarks that most closely align to college readiness and successful performance in evolving job markets.

Furthermore, there has been a past tendency for faith-based institutions to embrace secular constructs and then attempt to “shoehorn” in Religion. While McREL guides our curriculum work, it does not define our work, and we are free to use what we find helpful and reject what is not. Our Catholic identity and formation remains at the heart of who we are and what we do; in essence teaching our students to recognize and pursue that which is good, holy, true and beautiful.

### **3. How and when was the present curriculum model established in the Diocese of Gaylord Catholic Schools?**

In the 2000/01 school year, former Bishop Patrick Cooney recognized the need to provide curriculum support and resources for the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Gaylord, and contracted with recently retired principal, William (Bill) Gorney, to research and develop a rigorous comprehensive diocesan wide college preparatory curriculum for all academic subjects including Religion. Under Bill’s leadership, teachers in the Diocese of Gaylord Catholic Schools formed teams to study the standards and benchmarks, and begin assembling the curriculum on the various subjects. Religion was the first to be developed and by August 2001 a diocesan wide teacher in-service was held regarding the proposed Religion Standards and benchmarks. The other subjects followed.

Initially binders and CD’s were created and disseminated to each school. However, reviewing and updating the paper copies proved to be a challenge and by 2005 it was decided that since the compendium of standards and benchmarks on the [McREL](#) website are continually being updated, this electronic version would best guide our work in the future.

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### **4. What is meant by the term “Common Core?”**

Frequently referred to as the “Common Core,” the Common Core State Standards is the federal government’s educational initiative to establish, through a set of “common standards and benchmarks,” what exit outcomes and skills students should possess at the completion of each grade level (Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup>) with the aim of establishing conformity in expectations across all 50 states.

Standardized tests or “common assessments” are also being developed in order to drive the implementation. Additionally most, if not all, of the publishers have already, or are in the process of, aligning their textbooks to the Common Core. Currently only the Math and English standards are completed, but Science and Social Studies are scheduled to be developed as well.

### **5. How were the Common Core State Standards developed?**

The genesis for the development of the Common Core State Standards grew out of the American Diploma Project (ADP) which was initiated by both the Nation’s Governors and corporate leaders. In 1996 this group founded Achieve, Inc., a bi-partisan organization to raise academic standards, graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability in all 50 states. In 2004 Achieve released a report titled, “*Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts.*” The report explains that the major problem currently facing the American school system is that high school graduates are not provided with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and that the solution to this problem is a common set of rigorous standards. <http://www.achieve.org/ReadyorNot>

The initiative is sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Funding was also provided by the governors and state school chiefs, with additional substantive support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Pearson Publishing Company, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and others. Some of these same sources of funding for the Common Core in the United States are also promoting a similar initiative (common outcomes and aligned textbooks) worldwide through the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

### **6. Which states have adopted the Common Core State Standards?**

States were given an incentive to adopt the Common Core Standards through the possibility of competitive federal *Race to the Top* grants. Presently, forty-five of the fifty states have adopted the Common Core with the states of Texas, Virginia, Alaska, and Nebraska not adopting and Minnesota electing to adopt English only.

### **7. Why is there such debate about the Common Core State Standards?**

A great deal of discussion and debate is currently taking place across the country and here in Michigan with regards to the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The initiative is in response to long standing concerns (*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, April 1983) across multiple constituencies and stakeholders regarding high school preparedness to successfully enter the work force or higher education. With federalism and educational philosophy at the heart of the debate the initiative has fueled a great deal of controversy and as a result many are concerned about how this initiative might impact, for better or for worse, the Catholic schools here in our Diocese.

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### **8. What standardized assessment tools are used in the Diocese of Gaylord Catholic Schools?**

- North West Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress  
<http://www.nwea.org/> (grades 2-10)
- ACT College Readiness Battery <http://www.act.org/products/>
  - Explore Test – 7/8<sup>th</sup> grades
  - Plan – 9/10<sup>th</sup> grades
  - ACT – 11/12<sup>th</sup> grades
- NCEA Assessment of Children Religious Education (A.C.R.E.)  
<http://ncea.caltesting.org/about.html> which is an exit exam given at the highest elementary, middle school and high school grade level depending on the configuration of each school.

### **9. Why is the MEAP standardized assessment no longer given in the Diocese of Gaylord Catholic Schools?**

Although the diocese was performing well on the state assessment (Michigan Educational Assessment Program or MEAP), this tool proved of limited value to the diocese, including the following reasons:

- a. The test is tied to standards and benchmarks other than our own.
- b. Results take many months to obtain.
- c. The state consistently changes the “cut score” making the test an invalid comparison from year to year.

In the fall of 2004, our Diocese began using the North West Education Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP Test).